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American Travel Accounts of Early Rochester

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To see ourselves as strangers see us is always interesting, but it is sometimes more instructive to know how we appear to our own folks. During the early days of its settlement, numerous travelers from Europe and from the older and more settled regions of the United States passed through this area, some to investigate the possibilities for settlement, some on their way yet further west, but most of those who wrote journals were en route to that great tourist Mecca, Niagara Falls.

Though both Europeans and Americans tended to remark on many of the same things—the boundless fertility of the Genesee Country, the phenomenal growth of Rochester, the Genesee Falls, the Erie Canal and its famous aqueduct over the Genesee—the comments of the Americans have a different character from that of their European cousins. Accustomed to American forms of travel, Americans had less to say, or complain of, on this score. They saw less novelty in the social and governmental institutions of the region than did the Europeans and devoted their attention almost exclusively to the material and physical resources of the growing town. There were occasional references to politics, it is true, and an even more occasional comment in the later period on the moral condition of the town, but in the first case the observer's concern was frankly with figuring up the relative strength of parties in the next election, while

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in the second instance there was a similar interest in the community's chances of salvation. There was little curiosity as to the evolution of political and cultural institutions or their manner of functioning, such as was evidenced by many of the more thoughtful European visitors.

Both Americans and Europeans had harsh things to say of the new town, and there are enough instances of Eastern American condescension to make it evident that the patronizing attitude Americans sometimes complained of in European travelers was not exclusively European. Both groups of travelers contained their enthusiasts and both their critics.

The Wilderness Site

Of the many American or foreign travelers who visited and described the site of Rochester before settlement began, none was destined to become more famous or to play a greater role in Rochester's development than DeWitt Clinton. His first visit was made in 1810 in connection with his tour of the proposed route of the Erie Canal. Clinton, of course, was primarily interested in the topography and physical resources of the country, but he was also eager to learn all he could about the people and the commercial prospects of the region. His detailed notations are full of valuable historical data on all parts of the region he traversed:¹

July 28th. We departed from here [Perrin's tavern in town of Boyle] at seven o'clock, after breakfast, and after a ride of eight and a half miles arrived at a ford of the Genesee river, about twelve miles [sic!] from the Great Falls, and seven and a half miles from Lake Ontario. This ford is one rock of limestone. Just below it there is a fall of fourteen feet. An excellent bridge of uncommon strength is now erecting at this place. We took a view of the upper and lower falls. The first is ninety-seven and the other seventy-five feet. The banks on each side are higher than the falls, and appear to be composed of slate, cut principally of red freestone. . .

We dined and slept at Hanford's tavern; he is also a merchant, and carries on considerable trade with Canada. There is a great trade between this country and Montreal, in staves, potash, and flour. I was informed by Mr. Hopkins, the officer of the customs here, that 1000

1. William W. Campbell, ed., *The Life and Writings of DeWitt Clinton* (New York, 1849), pp. 112-113.

barrels of flour, 1000 ditto of pork, 1000 ditto of potash, and upwards of 100,000 staves have been already sent this season from here to Montreal. . . .

Notwithstanding the rain, we visited in the afternoon the mouth of the river. On the left bank a village has been laid out by Colonel Troup, the agent of the Pulteney estate, and called Charlottesburgh, in compliment to his daughter. He has divided the land into one acre lots. Each lot is sold at ten dollars per acre, on condition that the purchaser erects a house in a year. This place is in the town of Genesee. The harbour here is good. The bar at the mouth varies from eight to eight and a-half feet, and the channel is generally eleven feet. There were four lake vessels in it. We had an opportunity of seeing the lake in a storm, and it perfectly resembled its parent, the ocean, in the agitation, the roaring, and the violence of its waves.

The permanent settlement of Rochester commenced in 1812 but few travelers visited the frontier hamlet during the next half dozen years. The War of 1812 stopped idle visits to Niagara Falls, and after its close, when travelers reappeared, they followed the main stage route westward through Canandaigua, Avon and Batavia, thus skipping the Genesee Falls settlement to the north. It was in 1819 that Rochester, or more accurately the port of Rochester, attracted its first articulate American visitor, Captain Roger James, a member of the staff of General Jacob Brown who was journeying west to inspect the fortifications along the Great Lakes. Sailing westward near the southern shore of Lake Ontario, the Captain's boat touched at Rochester on June 1, 1819. Carthage Landing just below the lower falls was then the principal shipping point for the village, and the famous Carthage bridge was still standing strong and whole. To Captain Jones it seemed fully as impressive as the falls or the gorge, and certainly more noteworthy than Rochesterville where he breakfasted.²

I had heard something of the Falls of the Genessee, but more of the bridge at Carthage, the principal object of the visit. On approaching this thriving village however what was my astonishment, when, unexpectedly this brilliant waterfall bursted on the sight—dividing as it were the rich and impervious foliage which compassed it! . . . The bridge alluded to, is certainly a splendid specimen of American ingenuity. I will state its dimensions, the best commentary on it: from one end to the other, 714 feet; from the hand railing to the surface of the

2. "General Brown's Inspection Tour up the Lakes in 1819," Buffalo Historical Society, *Publications*, XXIV; 299-300.

river beneath, 200—and the whole fabric is sustained by *one great arch*, whose cord [sic] is 352 feet! . . .

The most remarkable circumstance in contemplating this splendid scene of nature, is, that all you behold, is seen from this stupendous bridge, itself 100 or 70 feet higher than the surface where the first break is made. Thus the work of man, if I may say so, seems to vie, with the works of nature.

When Catherine Maria Sedgwick, who was to become one of the most widely read 19th century American novelists, stopped at Rochester two years later the lofty bridge had collapsed and was a thing of the past. She likewise came by lake boat and noted another famous landmark of Carthage Landing, the inclined plane or railroad by which freight was hauled up the steep banks of the gorge.³

Descending the steep bank to the river, Mr. E. pointed us to a railway to facilitate the conveyance of freight up and down the bank. Captain Vaughan has a son on board, a sprightly boy of twelve, who last year was descending this railway in a box (like a wagon-box fixed on rollers). The rope broke the moment they began their descent. Young Vaughan seized a child who was with him—a *stranger*—and jumped over. The child was quite uninjured; and the boy, whose instinctive benevolence and selfpossession you will admire as much as I do, sustained very little injury. The box acquired immense velocity in the descent, and, of the two other persons with them, one was shockingly mangled and the other instantly killed.

No wonder most travelers preferred to walk up and down the long flights of steps that led from the landing to the top of the river bank!

A veritable procession of visitors now began to arrive in Rochester pen in hand. That same year of 1821 a literary pedestrian, Philip Stansbury, came to the village in the course of a twenty-three hundred mile journey on foot through North America. His description of Rochester is that of a town which had progressed far from the solitary state in which DeWitt Clinton found the site eleven years before.⁴

The bell tolled from a Gothic spire, as I entered the populous and fast increasing town of Rochester-ville, upon the Genessee. That river

3. Mary E. Dewey, ed., *Life and Letters of Catherine Maria Sedgwick* (New York, 1871), pp. 133-134.

4. Philip Stansbury, *A Pedestrian Tour of Two Thousand Three Hundred Miles in North America* (New York, 1822), pp. 91-94.

passes through the town, dividing it into two parts connected by two lengthy bridges; and continuing a little farther, suddenly rolls its whole volume down a precipice of ninety-six feet, when it expands, gently flows a mile and a half, and again dashes headlong down another precipice of seventy-six feet. Near this latter cataract, perched upon the edge of a most tremendous gulf, stands the forsaken village of Carthage, which, like Carthage of old, remains a monument of fallen grandeur, a mournful contrast to the *Tunis* of the Genesee, that already assumes the commerce of the great inland sea of Ontario.

Substantial stone mills and manufactories are seen in great numbers, arranged upon the banks of the never-failing stream. Viewed from the hill, Rochester presents a gay picture of some important commercial city; its stone, brick and wooden houses, the Great Canal running across the river upon a strong and costly aqueduct, the spires, the meeting houses, the hotels, in short all we behold, causes the mind to recur to the scenes of Babel, erecting an establishment which shall defy the rage of time. From one spot, I counted eighteen houses in the act of building. The custom is to have the gable ends facing the streets; and here we find the singular mode of raising the peaks, square, like the battlements of a castle. . . .

Boom Town

By 1825 Rochester was definitely a western boom town. Every traveler who passed through henceforward for a number of years remarked on its clatter, its bustle, and its general air of being in constant motion. This atmosphere impressed both a young Yale student and a Justice of the United States Supreme Court who passed through Rochester in the same summer of 1825 and recorded their impressions of the town. Both were on a tour to Niagara. The college boy (name unknown) and his uncle passed through the village while going west by canal and again on returning over the Ridge Road. He wrote:⁵

Aug. 17th, On the Canal. We arrived at Rochester about six o'clock this morning, and passed over the Genesee River by a splendid stone aqueduct. The town is almost a city. In 1812 it was a forest. Now it contains 5,000 people. . . . Passengers are continually going and coming. Our Captain left us at Rochester. He has gone to prosecute the owners of a scow, who would not let us pass before him according to rule. The different drivers are always quarreling. . . .

Aug. 21st. Rochester. We left Lewiston in the stage this morning at four o'clock, and arrived here at half past seven in the evening.

5. Samson Papers, Rochester Public Library.

We have been eighty miles, the greater part of it on the famous Ridge road. . . . This evening we took a walk around the village. It is as busy as a city, and indeed in a few years it will be one. The Genesee river affords excellent sites for mills, and the land is rich. The bed and shores of the river also afford fine building stone.

Aug. 22. Rochester. This morning we visited the falls of the Genesee, which present a fine picture to the eye. There is a constant clatter of mechanics and laborers of all kinds. There is employment for all. Many are engaged in splitting rocks on the river. . . . We stopped at the tavern [at Carthage] and played a game of ninepins, then returned after a most fatiguing walk.

Justice Joseph Story, stopped but briefly in Rochester, yet he was amazed at the rapidity and extent of its growth. His own hometown of Salem, then one of the greatest and most thriving American ports, had in two centuries of existence attained only about twice the population Rochester had acquired in little more than a decade. No wonder he wrote:*

Rochester is a beautiful place, containing about five thousand inhabitants, built up among the woods since 1815, and principally within five years. Many of the houses, public and private, are very handsome, the public accommodations excellent, and the luxuries even of a capitol, are found. . . . You seem to be in a place of enchantment at Rochester, and can scarcely believe your own senses, that all should have been the work of so short a period.

Equally impressed was Thomas L. McKenney in his account of a trip across New York in 1826. McKenney was at this time head of the newly created United States Bureau of Indian Affairs, and his westward journey was in connection with a projected treaty with the Chippewa, Menominee, and Winnebago Indians of the upper Great Lakes. His journey from Washington seems somewhat round-about, but it enabled him to go by one of the best travel routes of the period. Having reached Albany by river boat from New York, he boarded a canal boat at Schenectady. His description of a canal packet is probably unexcelled.*

This boat [the *DeWitt Clinton*] . . . is considered the best on the line; but her outside appearance, which is, however, like the rest of the

*William W. Story, ed., *The Life and Letters of Joseph Story* (Boston, 1851) I: 478.

packet-boats, I confess, made on me, as I came on board, a most unfavourable impression. You have only to go to the Potomac and look at one of your flour boats, of some 70 to 80 feet long, and fancy a box placed upon it, bottom upwards, resting with its edges on the gun-wales, narrowing gradually to the top, and covering the whole length, except some five feet at the bow where there is a little platform, or deck, and from which, and at the end of this box, is the entrance into the ladies' cabin; and some ten feet at the stern, where there is another platform, upon which the steersman stands, and in which end of the cover, or box, are the doors which lead into the gentleman's cabin, and where both gentlemen and ladies assemble to eat, and you have a fair specimen of the exterior of a canal boat. You pass into this cabin through a narrow passage way, leaving on your left the kitchen, between which and the cabin is a partition, and on the inside of which, and in a corner of the cabin, is *the box*. From the floor of the cabin to the top of the roof, is about six feet six inches, and in width, it is about thirteen feet and a half. The ladies' cabin is about eighteen feet long and the dining cabin, twenty-four. The rest of the length is taken up in the platforms, as stated, fore and aft; and in the kitchen, &c. From the top of this box, or covering, to the water, is about six feet.

This boat is drawn, as I have stated, by three horses, connected to it by means of a rope about eighty feet long. These horses trot along the *tow path*, as it is called, and which is immediately on the border of the canal, and at the rate, generally, of four miles the hour. The lumber boats rarely go over three miles the hour, and not often that, many of them being drawn by no more than one horse. The hindmost horse is rode by a "lad," as they call him, with a rusty white hat with a large rim, and a crown that fits his own to a shaving. The horses are relieved every ten miles, or fifteen, when the driver is changed also; but so far the same kind of hat has made its appearance. . . . When boats meet, they are steered so as to avoid one another, except now and then their sides rub, at the same time the horses of one boat are stopped, when, nevertheless, the boat continuing on by means of her previous onward motion, the rope sinks, and the other passes over it. . . . I forgot to mention, that on each side of the top, or covering to the boat, are windows of glass, which slide in between the casement, and venetian blinds on the outside, to the number of six or eight on a side; and that the top of the boat is reached from both ends by means of steps.

I was most agreeably surprised, however, on going into the cabin, to find such a show of accommodation and comfort. Around the sides are settees, some moveable and some stationary, and in the floor, for the accommodation of those who may wish to read, or write, are tables,

6. Thomas L. McKenney, *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes* (Baltimore, 1827), pp. 49-51, 84-89, 438.

whilst the walls, if I may so call them, and which incline gradually inwards from where they rest on the edges of the boat, are nicely painted, and ornamented with mirrors, &c., &c. The tables for eating are set on frames, which, after meals, are folded up and stowed away; and these, when the number of passengers require it, are spread on both sides the cabin; when otherwise, only on one—not, however, including the ladies' cabin, which is divided by folding doors, and has two tiers of stationary births, like those in steamboats; and which are quite handsomely ornamented. The upper births in the gentlemen's cabin are moveable, and are suspended by hooks, and from iron rods from the ceiling. The mattresses are kept in the lockers of the settees, on the tops of which the lower tier of mattresses is placed. Every contrivance is made, you perceive, in moveable tables, and moveable births, &c., to make as much room as possible.

In spite of these conveniences, McKenney passed a bad night, caused principally because the occupant of the berth above him would not allow the window to be opened. McKenney's discomfort was so intense that he left the packet the next day and took the stage for the rest of the journey across New York State. He magnanimously admitted, however, that in cooler weather and with fewer passengers canal travel would be delightful.

Thus he arrived at Rochester by stage, and found the weather as many Rochesterians have since experienced it—entirely unseasonable.

[At Rochester], we . . . found the air so cold as to make fires necessary for our comfort. A large one was blazing in the bar-room when we entered; and many persons seemed to be enjoying the rare luxury of a blazing fire on the 11th night of June. I asked for a thermometer to note the degree of temperature, but there was none at hand. . . .

It is difficult to begin a sketch of such a place as Rochester. The place is in such motion, and is so unmanageable as to put it out of one's power to keep it still long enough to say much about it. It is like an inflated balloon rolling and tumbling along the ground, and which the grapple itself cannot steady. It is unquestionably a wonderful town; and a town of extraordinary pretensions. It may be referred to as a standing proof that the wilderness may be made to vanish almost at a stroke, and give place in as little time to a city! . . . As if it was destined to come up at once a full grown city, without waiting for the gradual increase and perfection of its several parts, we see here some of the finest and most commodious public houses; an eye and ear infirmary; a bank; six churches, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist, Quaker, and Catholic; a court house and jail; and public baths! This you may find some difficulty in believing; but believe me it is so. Nor

are these appendages part of a log-house settlement. The town is generally built of brick, and the houses are commanding, and some of them beautiful. Buildings appear to be running up as rapidly as ever, and so pressing is the demand that the workmen have no time to clear the streets of the rubbish, the lumber, I mean, and shavings, the hills of mortar, and broken bricks, that go well nigh, in some places, to choke up the streets. . . .

I do not wonder at all at the man (not of Ross, but) of Rochester, who, on arriving at New York, exclaimed: "of all the places I have seen New York reminds me most of Rochester."

On his return from the West, McKenney again passed through Rochester, but the most interesting sight which he mentions was at Pittsford, where a canal show-boat was tied up at the wharf.

At ten miles from Rochester is the prettily situated town of Pittsford, which is composed of about eighty houses. At the wharf, on the canal, was a canal boat, having on its side in large letters, CANAL MUSEUM. Thus are the inhabitants of the villages, and the farmers along the line of the canal, waited upon with a collection of curiosities. The owners of the museum live in the boat and float up and down the canal in their moveable tenement

Still another journal of a tour to Niagara was that of William L. Stone, part owner of the *New York Commercial Advertiser*. Stone was a country boy who had won success in New York, and this performance of the fashionable Niagara tour was in part a tangible evidence to himself of his prosperity. However, he had an additional incentive in the fact that his parents had moved to what is now the village of Sodus.

Most of his journey was by canal, but from Sodus to Rochester the way, of necessity, was by stage. Stone described the entrance to Rochester through the Irondequoit dugway in these early days:"

Thursday, Oct. 1 [1829]. Left the residence of my father, and resumed my journey to the West, in the Oswego stage, for Rochester, where we were to have been set down at 7 o'clock. The preceding night and the morning, had been stormy. But the clouds broke away before noon; and at 3 P. M. when we started, the weather was fine. The road also was good, and we made the first stage with celerity. But soon after commencing the second stage, the clouds began to gather

7. William L. Stone, "From New York to Niagara; Journal of a Tour, in Part by the Erie Canal, in the Year 1829," *Buffalo Historical Society, publications*, XIV: 207-272.

darkly up, and at twilight we broke down. A rail was placed under the body of the coach, and we dragged slowly along for many a weary mile—having exchanged the Ridge Road for one infinitely its inferior. The darkness concealed many of the terrors of the descent of the dangerous pass of the dug-way, into the gulf of the Irondequoit; but the flickering lamps of the coach occasionally disclosed more than we cared about seeing. However, we got through in safety, and reached the Clinton House at about 11 o'clock instead of 7

Stone and his wife spent a day in Rochester recovering from the strain of this journey, but it was not until their return from Niagara the next week that Stone described the city in detail:

Sunday, Oct. 11. Rain in the morning, and a cloudy unpleasant day. Attended church with our friend Mr. H. Ely, with whom we took dinner. The preacher was the Rev. Mr. Eddy, an able and eloquent young man, settled at Canandaigua. His subject in the morning, was the duty of the Christian world to diffuse the gospel among the heathen. In the afternoon he preached an able and deeply interesting sermon, upon the means of regeneration, and the freeness of the Gospel to *all* mankind. Our personal intercourse with the preacher, at the house of Mr. Ely, was of the most agreeable description.

Monday, Oct. 12. Spent the morning in a lounge at the Athenaeum, and went through the spacious flouring mill of General Beach. It is the largest establishment of the kind in the United States, being calculated for 16 runs of stones, 10 runs of which are now in motion. It is not so compactly built, however, as the new mill of Mr. H. Ely, which I examined during my short visit 10 days ago. An immense business is transacted in the flour trade, and manufacture in this business [sic]. Mr. Ely's mills grind from 12 to 15 bushels per hour, from each of the six runs of stones, and the flour is cooled and packed as fast as it is made. And the mills of General Beach afford an average of 500 barrels per day. But these, though the largest, are by no means the only ones. There are a great number of large milling establishments here besides, besides those of the Messrs. Strang's [Strong's], and Mr. Atkinson's, at Carthage, two miles below. Visited this morning, also in company with Mr. Johnson and Dr. Ward, the new Episcopal church in St. Paul's street, called, also St. Paul's. It is a noble gothic structure, of stone, but not yet completed. The cost is estimated at 16,000 dollars. In New York it would have cost 50,000. Dined with my friend Mr. H. Ely, with Mrs. Stone, and some other female guests.

One of the more critical travelers to visit Rochester was Michael Hutchinson Jenks, who published his impressions in the *Ariel* of Phil-

adelphia in 1829-30. He was amazed at the pioneer conditions still prevailing west of Rochester along the Ridge Road, and although he admired the industrial development of the town, he was only too well aware of its many crudities.*

Rochester.—I arose early, as usual, and found a delightful morning. After breakfast I spent several hours in rambling through and about this town of rapid growth. There is no great beauty about it, and at this time I consider it a dirty place. All the streets are filled with mud and rubbish. Building is the order of the day, but there are few houses in the place which can be called handsome; and even the best are nothing to what I have seen in other towns. Yet, when its natural advantages are considered, I know no place which can compare with it. Patterson and Brandywine are very far behind it. It is calculated for as many mills as there are spots to place them, and the water can be used five or six times within the distance of a mile. Water seems to be made to do everything here. The blacksmiths have become so lazy that they even make it blow their bellows. . . . I have no hesitation in saying, that although Rochester can never be a handsome town, owing principally to its low situation, yet I believe it will see the time, perhaps very soon, when no place in the Union can exceed it in point of variety and manufactures.

An entirely different point of view from the observations of most travelers through Rochester and the Genesee region is found in James Gordon Bennett's diary of his travels through New York State in the summer of 1831. Bennett, later to be the founder of the *New York Herald*, was at this time an ardent Jackson supporter and adherent of Tammany Hall. He was frankly and primarily interested in estimating political feeling throughout the state, especially in those regions which had been "infected" by the virus of the Anti-Masonry opposition in recent years. Instead of descriptions of the physical appurtenances of Rochester, Bennett jotted down notes and impressions of conversations with leading citizens of the town. These notes though brief and almost cryptic in form and frequently scarcely legible, are extremely interesting.

After several days sojourn at the flourishing spa at Avon Springs, Bennett arrived in Rochester, where he talked with such Jacksonites as

8. [Michael Hutchinson Jenks], *Notes on a Tour through the Western Part of the State of New York, 1829-30*, [reprinted from the *Ariel*] (Rochester, N. Y., 1916), pp. 45-47.

John B. Ellwood, Judge Addison Gardiner, and Luther B. Tucker, publisher of the *Rochester Daily Advertiser*. From Ellwood and Gardiner, Bennett gleaned the following political information: *

There is a union between religion and politics in all this region of country. It is a sort of intangible coalition. All the Methodists formerly used to be democrats—the Presbyterians have now given the general impulse—the late Mr. Bissell was the man who invented this movement—he established the *Anti-Masonic Enquirer* in 1828—he was an active, energetic man—an enthusiast in his plans of consolidating first business with religion—and then politics with religion—he started the *Pioneer* line of stages and the *Pioneer* lines of Boats—since his death sold out—He formed the plan of keeping the Sunday—he adopted the Temperance Society plan—he made rules for the purpose of uniting all professors of religion on these plans—made them trade with none that did not also profess religion (this is a religious order like the Jesuits or Benedictines etc. etc.). . . .

The following year seventeen-year-old Caroline Westerly stopped briefly in Rochester with her father on her way from her home in Ohio to spend a year with her grandparents in Connecticut. Caroline took very seriously a self-imposed duty to share all her experiences with her fourteen-year-old sister, Louisa, back home. Indeed, judging from the length of her letters, she must have exhausted her supply of candles at every inn. Caroline, we are afraid, enjoyed showing off her knowledge to her younger sister in a way that was downright patronizing. Of the "curiosities" of Rochester she wrote:"

We first visited the celebrated aqueduct. This word, you know, is derived from the Latin, aqua water, and duco to conduct or lead; it therefore signifies conducting water. I have shown you the manner in which the canal passes down a steep declivity at Lockport. But at Rochester it has to pass a river with high perpendicular banks. Now how should you imagine, Louisa, that this could be accomplished? Just think of a bridge thrown over the river, made level with the canal, and then so tight as to hold water, and you have a conception of a canal aqueduct. It is a curious sight indeed to see a boat floating over a bridge.

The aqueduct bridge is said to be more than eight hundred feet long. You know our house is about fifty feet in length; so that this

9. James Gordon Bennett, "Diary of a Journey through New York," MS., typescript, Roch. Pub. Library.

10. Mrs. Almira H. L. Phelps, ed., *Caroline Westerley; or the Young Traveler from Ohio* (New York, 1870), pp. 125-131.

astonishing work must be as long as sixteen houses like our Pleasant Valley mansion. . . .

A short walk from the aqueduct bridge brings us to the great Falls on the Genesee. These are about ninety feet in height, and had I not previously seen Niagara, would have appeared to me a very grand spectacle. . . . Papa informed me that a few years since a poor creature by the name of Patch, who had gained money and notoriety by performing similar acts of daring, offered to go beyond all he had heretofore attempted, by leaping from a scaffold erected twenty-five feet above the rocks over which this river falls down to the gulf below. . . .

How much does the conduct of this poor creature resemble that of those who follow in the path of sin, intoxicating themselves with pleasure, until reason, principle, and fear are all drowned in the illusions of the senses, and they madly rush into the yawning gulf of perdition! . . .

While papa was relating to me, as we stood at the foot of the Falls, some of the circumstances of that tragical affair, I could not but exclaim, "Can it be possible that those who call themselves Christians stood on this spot and saw a fellow creature thus plunged into eternity . . . without raising a warning voice."

"At the time that this event occurred," papa said, "the state of moral and religious feeling of the inhabitants of Rochester was very different from what it is at present. Such an entertainment as this would now receive little countenance from any of the people in this vicinity, while with most it would be highly condemned and decidedly opposed."

As further evidence of this young lady's lofty character, she and her father attended services on Sunday in three different Rochester churches, to the great amazement of their English traveling acquaintances who thought they must be Methodists instead of Episcopalians!

The incident of Sam Patch also furnished reflection to no less a person than Nathaniel Hawthorne who endowed it with his own gently melancholy romanticism. The years of the early thirties were the years of Hawthorne's summer wanderings, primarily through New England, but at least one occasion took him to Niagara Falls. The date of his visit to Rochester is uncertain, but presumably about 1835. Like more and more travelers, both American and European, he noted that the practical people of Rochester were rapidly doing away with the "unprofitable sublimity" of the falls."

11. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Tales, Sketches and Other Papers* (Boston and New York, 1883), pp. 17-20.

The Genesee [wrote Hawthorne] has contributed so generously to their canals and mill-dams that it approaches the precipice with diminished pomp, and rushes over it in foamy streams of various width, leaving a broad face of the rock insulated and unwashed, between the two main branches of the falling river. Still it was an impressive sight, to one who had not seen Niagara. I confess, however, that my chief interest arose from a legend, connected with these falls, which will become poetical in the lapse of years, and was already so to me as I pictured the catastrophe out of dusk and solitude. It was from a platform, raised over the naked island of the cliff, in the middle of the cataract, that Sam Patch took his last leap, and alighted in the other world. . . .

How stern a moral may be drawn from the story of poor Sam Patch! Why do we call him a madman or a fool, when he has left his memory around the falls of the Genesee, more permanently than if the letters of his name had been hewn into the forehead of the precipice?

Was the leaper of cataracts more mad or foolish than other men who throw away life, or misspend it in pursuit of empty fame, and seldom so triumphantly as he? That which he won is as invaluable as any except the unsought glory, spreading like the rich perfume of richer fruits from various and useful deeds.

Thus musing, wise in theory, but practically as great a fool as Sam, I lifted my eyes and beheld the spires, warehouses and dwellings of Rochester, half a mile distant on both sides of the river, indistinctly cheerful, with the twinkling of many lights amid the fall of the evening. . . .

The town had sprung up like a mushroom, but no presage of decay could be drawn from its hasty growth. Its edifices are of dusty brick, and of stone that will not be grayer in a hundred years than now; its churches are Gothic; it is impossible to look at its worn pavements and conceive how lately the forest leaves have been swept away. The most ancient town in Massachusetts appears quite like an affair of yesterday, compared with Rochester. Its attributes of youth are the activity and eager life with which it is redundant. The whole street, sidewalks and centre, was crowded with pedestrians, horsemen, stage-coaches, gigs, light wagons, and heavy ox-teams, all hurrying, trotting, rattling, and rumbling, in a throng that passed continually, but never passed away. Here, a country wife was selecting a churn from several gayly painted ones on the sunny sidewalk; there, a farmer was bartering his produce; and, in two or three places, a crowd of people were showering bids on a vociferous auctioneer. I saw a great wagon and ox-chain knocked off to a very pretty woman. Numerous were the lottery offices,—those true temples of Mammon,—where red and yellow bills offered splendid fortunes to the world at large, and banners of painted cloth gave notice that the "lottery draws next Wednesday." At the ringing of a bell,

judges, jurymen, lawyers, and clients, elbowed each other to the courthouse, to busy themselves with cases that would doubtless illustrate the state of society, had I the means of reporting them. The number of public houses benefited the flow of temporary population; some were farmer's taverns,—cheap, homely and comfortable; others were magnificent hotels, with negro waiters, gentlemen landlords in black broadcloth, and foppish barkeepers in Broadway coats, with chased gold watches in their waistcoat-pockets. . . .

In short, everybody seemed to be there, and all had something to do, and were doing it with all their might, except a party of drunken recruits from the Western military posts, principally Irish and Scotch, though they wore Uncle Sam's gray jacket and trousers. I noticed one other idle man. He carried a rifle on his shoulder and a powder-horn across his breast, and appeared to stare about him with confused wonder, as if, while he was listening to the wind among the forest boughs, the hum and bustle of an instantaneous city had surrounded him.

The Flour City

Few travelers were better qualified to describe Rochester's transformation into a city than Willis Gaylord Clark. Besides editing *Relf's Philadelphia Gazette*, Clark contributed a series of articles, entitled the "Ollapodiana Papers," to his brother's magazine, the *New York Knickerbocker*. The essays covered a wide range of topics including Clark's experiences on a trip to Niagara in 1836. He visited Rochester on his homeward journey after some harsh experiences in several villages west of the city:"

The entrance to Rochester, from the West, is impressive by contrast; and when you are once rattling over its pavements, and through its long streets, you fancy yourself in New York, or eke in Philadelphia. The suburbs are beautiful. I envied so deeply the lot of some certain friends who escorted us along the banks of the fair Genesee, and showed us the Falls of that charming river, that their residences still rise to my eye as the very acme of rural establishments. From the roof of one, (which must be a palace anon) I looked down upon the flowery walks, the sparkling cataract, the vast pine forests to the north; the blue Ontario beyond; the city with its turrets, some of which are like those which peer above an old feudal town in Europe; upon rail-cars rattling to and fro, while the horns of canal-men came musically upon the breeze; upon shady dwellings of good old friends in the suburbs; and as I looked, said, "this shall be glorified by Ollapod! . . ."

12. Lewis G. Clark, ed., *Literary Remains of the Late Willis Gaylord Clark* (New York, 1844), pp. 174-176.

The sense of rapid change which impressed so many visitors to Rochester is reflected in the journals of Henry A. S. Dearborn, who in 1838 stopped at Rochester en route from Niagara to Oswego. Dearborn was the son of General Henry Dearborn of the Revolution and the War of 1812. The son had been with his father on the Niagara frontier during the latter war, which was probably the occasion of a previous visit to the Genesee mentioned in the journal. During 1838 Dearborn made several trips back and forth across New York State in his position as Massachusetts representative under the old Hartford Treaty supervising the disposal of the Seneca reservations to the Ogden Land Company. Though he passed through Rochester several times on these travels, his visit of October 4 is the only one in which he describes the town.¹³

The Lake was as smooth as a river last night & we entered the Genesee at 3 o'clock, this morning I got up & walked the deck until we reached the landing, three miles from its mouth, & two & a half from Rochester. We came to at 4, but broke the shaft of one wheel, when half way up the river. I went up to Rochester in a light wagon, with the Steward of the boat, walked about the city & crossed the aqueduct, just as the sun was rising; at seven left in the rail-road cars to return to the landing. What a change since I was at the Genesee falls in 1813! Then there was a miserable single saw mill & log hut on the west side of the falls & a small one story house just raised & partly board[ed] on the east side & now there is a city of 18,000 inhabitants. Never in any age, has human intelligence, industry & enterprise produced such glorious, such wonderful results as in this country since the Revolution.

In 1839, Horace Greeley followed his own advice of "Go west, young man" and took a trip to Michigan. Like Willis Clark, he made his travels do service in filling the columns of the *New Yorker*. Of Rochester, he wrote:¹⁴

The world first heard of Rochester after the completion of the Erie Canal, and heard with surprise that a great and thriving place of business had sprung from the bosom of the wilderness in the course of the last three or four years. Extravagant stories were told and extravagant expectations formed of it, with which thousands were first amused, then disgusted. A fever of speculation was succeeded by a season of

13. Henry A. S. Dearborn, "Journals," Buffalo Historical Society, *Publications*, VII: 149-150.

14. Horace Greeley, in the *New Yorker*, VII:265 (July 13, 1839).

lethargy, and many very sagely concluded that the new emporium so much vaunted would sink as it had risen. I believe that, in 1827, it was the prevalent impression elsewhere that this place had "touched the highest point of all its greatness." How sagacious was this opinion, the fact that it has nearly or quite trebled its size and population in the twelve years which have since intervened, will determine.

Rochester now irregularly covers an area of some four square miles, and is steadily extending its borders and filling up its waste places. The great Revulsion of 1837 probably affected it less than any other city of the Union. . . .

I devoted a long day last week to an inspection of some of the "lions" of the place. The first of these which strikes the stranger is the Great Aqueduct now being constructed across the Genesee for the passage of the Enlarged Grand Canal. . . . The foundation is filled in with the common stone of the country, generally blasted from the bed of the river—the water being turned hither and thither by dams to allow of blasting and smoothing the solid rock which forms its bed. The arches themselves, however, as well as all the exposed and important portions of the Aqueduct, are built of the choicest stone, brought from the Onondaga quarries near Syracuse, and so nicely cut that a child's finger can hardly be anywhere inserted between two of them when placed together uncemented. Being of large size, and cut to form arches, abutments, etc., as well as of regular shape, they cannot fail to form one of the most solid and durable structures ever erected. It is difficult to say how it can ever be destroyed or disordered. . . . The old one [aqueduct], just below it, is completely dwarfed by the comparison. It was ill contrived and constructed, of poor stone, and has needed bracing already. It has long threatened to give way before the new one is ready to supersede it, but probably will not, as the latter is to be finished at the opening of navigation next spring.

Another "lion" of Rochester, which I have not room to describe as it deserves, is the new cemetery or field of burial belonging to the city, and christened MOUNT HOPE! It is situated on an eminence a mile and a half south of the city, commanding a full view of it, and nearly covered with a natural growth of young wood. The enclosure contains about fifty acres of hill and valley, copse and glade, agreeably diversified, and presenting many situations of natural and quiet beauty. Two or three little lakes are to be constructed in different quarters; the Genesee forms a portion of the northwestern boundary; and, notwithstanding the broken character of the ground, which is, in places, almost precipitous, good carriage roads have been formed over a great part of it. Families have selected and purchased their places of burial, and commenced the work of adorning and beautifying them, even when they have not been called upon to use them more decidedly. . . . On

the whole, the cemetery reflects credit on the taste and feeling of the authorities and citizens of Rochester. . . .

By this time Rochester was a stable and thriving city, exhibiting an appearance which won the approval of visitors from older and larger cities. Thus the novelist, Mrs. Eliza Steele, in 1840, not only admired the public buildings, but described the city's residences as examples for other communities to emulate.¹⁵

Churches, houses, hotels and banks, court house and arcade, markets were all of marble or stone. There are here fourteen churches, some of them quite handsome. The Episcopal Church of St. Paul's is a fine gothic edifice of grey stone—the church [which] enjoys the ministration of Rev. Mr. W[hitehouse], is also handsome, of gothic form, neatly edged with brown free stone—the presbyterian is of grey plaster supported by substantial abutments—the baptist, where Mr. C[omstock] officiates, . . . [is] a neat brick edifice—also catholic, methodist and bethel for the canal men. The streets are many of them McAdamized. There is a fine park here surrounded by neat railings where the children of the neighborhood are brought to take exercise. But what most elicited our admiration were the private dwellings, which in number and beauty are seldom equalled in our cities. They are spacious, built of marble or stone, in gothic or grecian form surrounded by wings and piazzas, and outbuildings and grounds handsomely laid out, adorned with shade trees, shrubbery and flowers. They are delightful retreats from the city's dust and noise; make fine playgrounds for the children, and altogether evince much taste and wealth. How much better it is for men of fortune to secure for themselves and families, pure air and room for exercise, instead of squeezing, as they do in our city, into houses only 30 by 100 feet, as is too much the custom in our cities. . . .

In addition to mistaking Rochester's freshly painted wooden houses for marble palaces, Mrs. Steele advanced a theory for the origin of the Ridge Road, by which she departed for Lockport, that is by far the most unique of the many fanciful suggestions put forward by unscientific souls:

A great part of our way lay over the famous ridge road, an elevation of ground about as wide as a common road formed of sand and shells, and which is supposed once to have been the shore of Lake Ontario, now about ten miles distant. . . . Why may it not have been a public road, formed by that indefatigable race of diggers, the *mound builders* . . . the descendants of the builders of Babel, and when dispersed by

15. Eliza R. Steele, *A Summer Journey* (New York, 1841), pp. 4647, 50.

the confusion of tongues wandered about the world and at last found themselves in America.

In this same year of 1840, William L. Stone, who had described Rochester in 1829, made a return visit to the city. This time, it was not Niagara but the beauties of the upper Genesee Valley which lured him to another vacation journey to western New York. At Rochester, Mr. Stone was strongly reminded of his previous visit—so strongly in fact that he apparently got out his 1829 journal and copied whole sentences and phrases from it to incorporate into his present account. Yet his observations in 1840 were keen enough to detect an important new aspect of the city's history. This was the period of the "Flour City," but already a start had been made toward the "Flower City." Wrote Stone in describing the town:"

Great attention is paid to the cultivation of flowering shrubs and ornamental trees, in all their luxuriant varieties; and considering the comparative youth of the city, and considering also the fact that the inherent hostilities which first settlers have to trees induced those of Rochester to commence the work of civilization by cutting down every green thing, the surprise is great to one who has watched the growth of these Western towns and cities as I have done, at the quantity of shrubbery that waves its bright verdure to the breeze. . . . Greatly, therefore, are both the comfort and beauty of Rochester heightened by luxuriant foliage of the trees.

Again, Stone visited the mills of Rochester:

There is no other town in the world where there are so many flouring-mills, constructed upon so large a scale, and built with such expense and solidity. When these mills are all in motion, as in ordinarily good times they usually are, they are adequate to the daily manufacture of five thousand barrels of flour, and requiring daily nearly twenty-five thousand bushels of wheat. . . . Mr. Ely's mill . . . stands upon the edge of the canal, and has either nine or twelve runs of stone, (I forget which), and the whole edifice seems to be almost as full of machinery as the case of a watch—and this machinery seems to be of the most complete and perfect character. For instance, a boat laden with wheat may be run alongside of the mill; the wheat shovelled into a chain of ascending buckets, and carried through every process of cleaning, grinding, cooling, bolting, and being conveyed into the barrels, into which it is pressed by the machinery, ready for the cooper,

16. William L. Stone in the *N. Y. Commercial Advertiser*, reprinted in Samson, "Studies in Local History," LXX, LXXI.

as the last office to clap in the head. And the wheat is carried through all the different processes by being handled but once. First, it is carried up into the fifth, or topmost loft, where it goes through one machine to fan out the remaining chaff. It goes through another machine, to be separated from chess and cockle; it is then carried through another, which cleanses it of the smut, if any; it then descends into the hopper, and being ground, it goes into the bolters, whence it passes into buckets again, and is carried up into the cooling chambers, into which it is thrown and spread out for cooling. As it becomes cool, it is carried out by machinery, and brought down cool, superfine flour, and packed, as I have before described.

With this evidence of the progress of the machine age in Rochester, the period of the city's beginnings as seen through the eyes of American travelers closes. The frontier had passed far to the westward, and Rochester and the Genesee Country now took their places among the settled regions of the country. Like other frontiers it had played its part in contributing to that spirit of self-confidence and exuberance which characterized nineteenth century America. American travelers, more than those from other lands, reflect the increasing pride and confidence in the boundless possibilities of the future which the nation derived from the settlement of such new areas.

